DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 078 316 CG 007 214

AUTHOR Lennon, Roger T.
TITLE Testing and Equality: The Great Divorce?
PUB DATE Feb 72
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the California Personnel and Guidance Association convention in Los Angeles, California on February 19-21, 1972

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Disadvantaged Groups; Disadvantaged Youth; Equal Facilities; Equal Opportunities (Jobs); *Minority Groups; Norm Referenced Tests; Speeches; *Standardized Tests; Student Testing; *Test Bias; *Testing; Testing Problems; Tests

ABSTRACT

The paper examines the issue of whether the concepts and practices of standardized testing, on the one hand, and the pursuit and attainment of equal opportunity, on the other, are compatible. The author cites a number of areas where tension and conflict have centered; however, he feels that there is no necessary incompatibility between the assessment of human talents and the pursuit of both equality and excellence. A number of suggestions are discussed which might help to ameliorate some of the problems of testing of minority groups: 1) keep the discussion at a rational, rather than inflammatory, level; 2) explore new instrument development to more accurately capture the magnitude and variety of abilities of minorities; 3) expand training in the administration and interpretation of present tests with minority examinees; 4) adopt more systematic procedures for review and analysis of tests; 5) cross-check and verify test scores against other signs of talent; and 6) use tests humanely. (Author/SES)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

TESTING AND EQUALITY: THE GREAT DIVORCE?

Roger T. Lennon
Senior Vice President
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

ED 078316

The title of my talk is intended to present as a question for us all the issue of whether the concepts and practices of standardized testing, on the one hand, and the pursuit and attainment of equality, or equal opportunity, on the other, are compatible. Can they co-exist? Does testing flourish at the expense of equality, or must it give way in our striving to achieve equality? Not to keep you in suspense, I will tell you that my answer to the question is that there is no necessary conflict or incompatibility between the assessment of human talents and the pursuit of both equality and excellence. Yet signs of tension and even conflict abound. Let me cite a few.

- The U. S. Supreme Court, during the past year, in the Griggs vs. Duke Power case, has struck down the use of certain tests for employment and promotion purposes, on the grounds that these tests, in the context, discriminated unfairly against certain minority employees, depriving them of equal access to jobs. Numerous similar actions, directed against testing practices of both private and public employers, are working their way through the courts.

- The Chicago Board of Education, within the past month, has decreed an end to the use of achievement tests in its schools, hoping thereby to encourage test-makers to build tests that will be "more nearly fair" to all pupils.

- APGA last year was presented with a resolution calling for a moratorium on the use of tests, at least with minority groups, pending the availability of instruments that would not penalize minority group members.

CG 007 214

Presented at California Personnel and Guidance Association convention, February 20, 1972, Biltmore Hotel, Los Angeles, California.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

- The Civil Rights section of HEW has been attempting to develop guidelines that would permit its field examiners to determine when test results were being used to achieve unequal or discriminatory ability grouping practices.

- The Human Rights Commission of NEA is conducting a conference in Washington that will take a searching and hostile look at the use of tests with minority groups.

- Increasing concern is being voiced over the presumed unfair impact on minority groups of tests used for admission to colleges and professional schools, and for certification or employment in professional roles, as in the case of the examination for principal in the New York City schools.

- In California, there is the well-known litigation concerning alleged misclassification as mentally retarded of certain Chicano children on the basis of individual test results; and there is now the threat, at least, of litigation directed at the state-mandated ability testing program. The New York City and Los Angeles bans on group intelligence testing as unfair to non-whites are still in effect.

One could add to the list, but surely these evidences are sufficient to suggest the scope of the concern. No matter how one feels about the merits of the particular actions, there is no escaping the need to confront the issues, clarify them and offer the most sensible resolutions we can achieve.

At the same time, it is salutary to see these items in perspective, and to know how much impact they have had on the over-all testing picture. It is therefore pertinent to report that in 1970, the last year for which data are available, use of standardized tests was greater than in 1969, and indeed greater than in any previous year. No statistics are collected on sales by type of test, so one cannot say, for example, whether sales of ability tests, the most frequently criticized type, increased or declined over-all. Speaking for the two organizations with which I am associated, however, I can report that not

only were total sales of tests higher in 1971 than in 1970 or previous years, but that sales of mental ability tests, whether group or individual, revealed no decline. There was in 1971 a small falling off in sales of tests to industry. Whether this is a consequence of Duke Power-type litigation, anti-testing pressures of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Federal Contract Compliance Commission guidelines, or simply the general slowdown in the economy, we cannot say. It seems safe to conclude that, up to the present, while the rumblings of thunder have been all about us, the lightning has reached very little of our testing practice. We cannot, of course, predict whether this will continue to be the case. But whatever our reading of the future, the situation calls for our most serious study now.

A test, of its nature, seeks to discern differences among people. If a test fails to yield such discriminations, it is useless. Even in the case of the simplest criterion-referenced tests, of which we hear much these days, we seek to categorize persons into at least two classes. So, in a sense, tests must tell us that people are not equal, that some have more and some have less, and many are in between, with respect to whatever the tests measure. And it is not in this sense that we worry about testing and equality. The common theme running through all the items that I have cited is clear: the notion that the tests are serving, by design or inadvertence, as exclusionary devices, as gatekeepers which admit to educational opportunity, to employment, to positions of power and prestige, on some unfairly discriminating basis. Neither the Supreme Court decision, nor the EEOC guidelines, for example, condemn the use of tests. Indeed, they do not regard the mere fact of differences in average performance among groups as evidence of unfairness. It is only when unsupported inferences are drawn from these differences as to the likelihood of success in educational or vocational pursuits that unfair discrimination or unequal treatment is perceived.

One of the problems that has occasioned much of the difficulty is the confusion as to what is meant by equal educational opportunity, what the implications are, what pupil classification schemes follow from the concept of equal educational opportunities. Surely it does not mean that every child will be exposed to the identical program, identical instructional materials, and will move through these at the same lock-step pace. Neither does it mean, by any reasonable definition of the term, that everyone shall have an opportunity to pursue any program he chooses, regardless of the qualifications he has. The only sensible concept of equal opportunity, it seems to me, is one in which it is declared that all shall have access to those opportunities from which they are capable of profiting and which they have the will to pursue; and they should not be excluded from such opportunities because of the color of their skin, where their father was born or what income their family enjoys. Having said that, we have marked the necessary conditions that must prevail if a testing program is to function compatibly with the pursuit of equal opportunity and with the fulfillment of individuals, whether they come from majority or minority sectors.

It is disheartening to realize that the issues now agitating us have been with us since testing's earliest days. Fifty years ago, almost to the day, Dr. William Bagley, famed Teachers College professor, wrote

> "The sanction which mental measurements apparently give to educational determinism is based, not upon the facts that measurements reveal, but upon the hypotheses and assumptions that the development of the measures has involved; that these hypotheses and assumptions, while doubtless justified for certain purposes, are at basis questionable in the last degree; and that the present tendency to extend them ad libitum beyond a very restricted field is fraught with educational and social dangers of so serious and far-reaching a character as to cause the gravest

concern" and that "even if the assumptions were granted, many of the fatalistic inferences drawn from the data in hand are not justified." Dr. James McK Cattell, who founded The Psychological Corporation fifty years ago, wrote in an early annual report,

> "We can at present make certain standard determinations with the same degree of accuracy as the physician can diagnose a disease or a chemist analyze a water supply. The army intelligence tests have put psychology on the map of the United States, extending in some cases beyond these limits to fairyland. However little some of you may like newspaper and magazine exploitation of the assumption that psychologists have proved that a mental age of thirteen is prescribed by heredity for half the adult population, that ninety-five per cent of the people are below the average in ability, that clerks have been proved to be more intelligent than skilled mechanics, and the like, we may at least hope that this publicity will ultimately lead to an understanding of the proper use of psychological tests. Even the pretensions of ignoramuses and charlatans may be voices crying from the wilderness to make straight the way for psychology."

Why have we been so unproductive, so unimaginative, over all these years in accommodating our testing instruments or practices to the understandings present even a half-century ago? I am reminded of an experience I had last December, while in Ireland as a member of an international advisory group on establishing a national standardized testing program for the Irish schools. The President of St. Patrick's College, the national teacher training institution in Ireland, delivering the opening address to our group, commented on the fact that standardized testing was virtually unknown in the Irish schools, and that only now was there interest in initiating its use. Anticipating our puzzlement over this lag, he told us of a saying common among the Irish, to the effect that if

anyone heard that the end of the world was coming, he should go to Ireland, since everything came to Ireland fifty years after it reached the rest of the world. We reassured him that we, too, had our cultural lags.

Certainly there is no simple prescription that will cure all the ailments, real and imagined, that attend the testing of minority groups. I make bold, however, to offer a few suggestions, some or all of which I think everyone here could incorporate in his practice to ameliorate the situation.

a. First, I urge that we lower our voices in carrying on the dialog. Much of the writing and speaking on all sides of the discussion is polemic in tone, inflammatory, by intent or otherwise, and ill-becoming to persons who hold themselves out as scholars and professionals. Perhaps we should declare a moratorium on doctrinaire, unsupportable declarations, whether to the effect that "everybody knows that all our tests are unfair to blacks, or Puerto Ricans, or Chinese," or "research has shown that 60 or 70 or 80% of intelligence is hereditary," or any of the similar bits of mythology that have been filling the literature. Statements that impute bad faith or ill will to those entertaining contrary views do nothing, after all, to clarify the problems or bring us closer to resolving them. I appreciate that it is easier to say "Let's cool it" for those who do not feel aggrieved or victimized by the present system, and that there is, therefore, a greater burden on the others to keep the discourse at a rational level. Is the politics of confrontation really the only way to cope with these issues?

b. Second, let us be about the exploration of new instrument development with intensified vigor. If we believe that present instruments do not accurately reflect the magnitude or variety of the abilities of minority examinees, it can only be because we think we discern other evidences, other behaviors, that signify the presence of talents missed by current tests. What are these other behaviors? How can we observe and measure them? How can we demonstrate their

predictive or other utility? Here, obviously, we need to involve, or better yet, give primary responsibility to, persons intimately familiar with the minority culture, its special psychology, behavior patterns, etc. Why should not a group such as CAMEG, the voice of measurement in a state having so large a Chicano population, encourage or sponsor this kind of research and test development?

c. If you believe, as I do, that a good part of the criticism of use of present tests with minority groups stems more from improper use of the tests than from qualities of the instruments themselves, then you will agree on the need for expanded training in the special problems of administration and interpretation of present tests with these minority examinees. Again, why shouldn't CAMEG provide leadership in the establishment of more such training programs? I will say that my organizations would be willing to provide some grants, at least, in support of such programs.

d. I recommend that you adopt more systematic procedures for review and analysis of the tests in use in your system from the standpoint of appropriateness of content, directions, mechanics, norms, for the minority pupils in your system. In establishing such procedures you will at least be forced to render explicit your assumptions as to what constitutes "unfairness," surely a first step toward clearer understanding of the matter.

e. I suggest that you be especially sensitive in the case of minority pupils to discrepancies between test scores and other information about their abilities. Since the assumption of similar background and prior experience, implicit in any predictive use of test scores, is almost by definition not true in such cases, it is particularly important to cross-check and verify test scores against other signs of talents.

f. I plead, finally, in this context as in all, for a humane use of tests. Testing is often accused of a depersonalizing effect, of seeking to reduce the

richness and vibrancy of a human being to a sterile set of numbers. I have always counted myself a humanist, and have never thought it anti-humanist to value precision in one's information, or convenience and communicability in its use, which is what test scores seek to do; but the neo-Luddites among us who lament the scoring machine, the scanner and computer, have a grain of truth in their charge. We must not lose the person in the scores.

This tension between the desire for scientific precision and the need for human value reminds me of a friend's experience. This man grew up in a devout Catholic home, attended Catholic grammar school, high school and college, from which he graduated rich in the faith. He decided to become a psychologist, and went on for his masters and doctorate in a large state university, with very heavy emphasis in his training on the scientific method, experimental rigor, necessity for hard evidence, and the like, creating, as you might expect, certain dissonances in his approach to life. He coped well with them, however, until his wife presented him with twins. He resolved his conflict by having one of them baptized and keeping the other as a control.

Let me leave you with the lines of a short Walt Whitman poem, entitled "When I Heard the Learned Astronomer"

> "When I heard the learned astronomer,
> When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me
> When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them;
> When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
> How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
> Till rising and gliding out I wandered off by myself,
> In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
> Looked up in perfect silence at the stars."

Which of us does not resonate to the sentiment of those lines? We students of testing and equality, like the astronomer, have our charts and tables and figures – our medians and standard deviations and correlations – and we dare not foresake them as we prize our science and profession. But our stars are out there, too – the children, the young people, the adults, majority and minority, whose fortunes

we help to shape. Shall we go and look at them, in silence?